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ABSTRACT

Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), speaks about the national testing of teachers and calls for the creation of a new and better national examination for new teachers. While members of the AFT have a few differences with some of the current reform proposals, the AFT in general supports the overwhelming majority of specific proposals called for in the various reports on the state of education. Current examining procedures are inadequate. Problems exist in the nature and level of the testing, and also with conflicts regarding the quality and quantity of teachers needed. The AFT supports the notion of a national teacher examination developed along the same lines as examinations for doctors, actuaries, or lawyers. Such an instrument and testing program could be developed by a group of leaders of educational organizations, college presidents and other professionals in the field who could constitute themselves as a non-governmental American board of education. Such an instrument and testing program could be developed within three to five years. The test should cover three general areas: subject matter knowledge, ability to make judgments to justify instructional decisions, and an internship program. Teacher organizations can have a very important role in the development as well as the acceptance of such a test in that the AFT and the National Education Association could make passage of such an examination a requirement for membership. (CB)

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A CALL FOR PROFESSIONALISM

American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker Proposes the Creation of a National Exam for New Teachers

National Press Club Speech
January 29, 1985

"Current exams for new teachers would be considered a joke by any other profession . . . . we in the AFT believe strongly that the benefits of education reform will soon go down the drain as standards are lowered to meet the teacher shortage unless a new and better exam is created."

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SP 026 989

American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker Proposes the Creation of a National Exam for New Teachers

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THANK YOU very much. During the reception that preceded this luncheon, one of the reporters came up to me and said, "Well, the last time you were here, it was just the last minute in the question period that one of us managed to prod the news from you." That was a warning, so instead of waiting until the last minute, I think the time is now, at the very beginning, to state that I am here to do something that I believe no national organization in American education has done for before, and that is to call for a national teacher examination.

There have been organizations—ours included—favoring the idea of some examination for teachers. There have been localities that have developed their own tests; some states have developed theirs; and a national teacher exam does exist. But this is a call for something quite different.

The context of this call for a national test for new teachers is the reform movement of of the past few years. While we have a few differences with a few of the proposals, we in the American Federation of Teachers support the overwhelming majority of specific proposals called for in the various reports that came out. And even on those we do not specifically support or those with which we have some reservations, we believe the movement for reform is so important that the AFT is willing to talk of compromise on those issues.

Central to the issue of educational excellence and improvement is a staff, specifically teachers, who are capable of carrying out the program outlined in these reports. Many of the reports do call for examinations, and a number of the states have now adopted examinations. But the current examining process is inadequate.

FIRST, CURRENT exams for new teachers would be considered a joke by any other profession. For the most part, they are minimal competency examinations for teachers. What does minimal competency mean? Well, in a state like Florida, minimal competency for an elementary school teacher in mathematics is measured by passing an examination on a sixth-grade mathematics level. There are similar examinations involving English, involving history, involving the other subjects.

Now, this would be the equivalent of licensing doctors on the basis of an examination in elementary biology or licensing accountants and actuaries on the basis of some type of elementary mathematics examination. I don't wish to criticize the states that have adopted these tests. It was difficult for them to do it. They met a great deal of opposition. In many cases, they met court challenges. What they have done is to take the first step. But it's important to distinguish a necessary first step from an adequate program of testing, which is quite different.

I THINK the second problem, aside from the nature of the examination, is that we are about to face once again the traditional crunch: the conflict that exists at the state and local level between quantity and quality. We know what's coming. We've seen the statistics. Depending upon whether you take a more or less optimistic projection, it's quite likely that even in fields other than mathematics and science we will be experiencing, within the next five years, a substantial national teacher shortage.

". . . Minimal competency for an elementary school teacher in mathematics is measured by passing an examination on a sixth-grade mathematics level . . ."

"... This would be the equivalent of licensing doctors on the basis of an examination in elementary biology or licensing accountants and actuaries on the basis of some type of elementary mathematics examination ..."

In fields like medicine, if one experiences a shortage of doctors, you do not find states or hospitals giving anyone a substitute emergency medical license to go out and practice. We don't do it in law or dentistry or in any other field. But our local education agencies will be faced with the usual tough choices as this shortage emerges and grows. They could do the equivalent of what most other professions would do, and do indeed do. That is, after the children come to school and after each teacher's class is full, they could turn to the remaining students and parents say, "Sorry, there is a shortage of teachers, and those of you who could not be accommodated this semester will be given the first opportunity to take the first grade next semester or next year."

The schools won't do that. There is a custodial function to schools, and there is no place in the country where the children will be sent home. They will be permitted to enter.

And so the local education agency is then faced with other choices. They can stand tough and say, "We will not employ anyone who is not qualified by whatever standards have been established. We will not employ, even on a temporary basis, anyone to be a teacher who does not meet these standards."

Of course, that would mean the number of teachers now available would have to divide among them the additional number of students. We would see class size going up each year or each semester in the coming years until, perhaps, we had classes in this nation at a level of 40 or 43 or 44 or 45. That, too, is unlikely. Teachers will complain. Union contracts will undoubtedly be violated in many cases, and parents would complain that the quality of education is deteriorating because the number of children in the class is too large.

And so, of course, school boards and states will do what they have always done. They will ignore the standards that they established. They will at first make believe that they're not ignoring them because they will claim that the people who are being employed are not really going to be there very long. They will be temporary teachers or substitute teachers or emergency teachers, and they will be about as temporary as the temporary buildings that were set up in Washington, D.C., at the end of World War II.

These temporary teachers will be around, and they will become members of the teacher union in the district and will constitute a large number of people in the state who will teach one, two, three, four, five, six and seven years. Eventually they will constitute a political block powerful enough to go to the state legislature to get some type of legislation to get themselves the right certificate. Because, after all, it's unfair to use someone day in, day out, exactly as though they were qualified, keep them there for all those years, and then tell them they have no right to a pension or no right to some other benefits.

So, in the midst of all these reports and all this talk about excellence and quality, we're actually about to lower standards and lower the quality, because the minute we relax standards, quality suffers.

Of course, there is another alternative I haven't mentioned: When local school boards or states find they are not able to attract the necessary number of qualified teachers, they could turn to the public and say, "We obviously are not paying enough, or we're not treating our people well, or those who are now here are leaving in great numbers, and we ought to do something about that." This also is not likely unless something new happens. Certainly in the past this was not the way it was done.

AND SO I want to return to this notion of a national teacher examination. I want to make it very clear that I am not talking about a national teacher examination established by the United States government. I don't think that's the right

place for such an examination to evolve. There are other professional groups that essentially do have national types of examinations (though there may be some regional variations). There are examinations given to doctors and to actuaries. There is a bar exam that contains important national components. And none of those is established or created or maintained by the United States government.

A process similar to that which established testing procedures and examinations in other professions could, and indeed should be, developed in education. Now, whenever you start something, there is not the great certainty that exists after something has been in place for 30 or 40 or 50 years and people can say, "Ah, that's obviously the way to do it, and it's simple." However, a start should be made. Within the next six months a group of leaders of educational organizations, college presidents and, perhaps, leading professionals in other fields who have had some experience with entry-level tests should convene and constitute themselves as an independent group, non-governmental—an American board of professional education. The name is not important, but the notion is very clear.

It would be a group that would spend a period of time studying exactly what a teacher should know before becoming certified and the best way to measure that knowledge. It would seek to have instruments established. It might be that existing testing agencies would create such instruments to be looked at and evaluated by this board. Over a period of time, I would hope the board would eventually be controlled by the profession itself, even if it didn't start completely that way.

I BELIEVE that in a period of three to five years such an instrument could be created, and it would most likely include three general areas. One of them obviously is the subject matter that a teacher needs—and I hope that would not be tested at the sixth-grade level. It is important that the teachers know more than the students they're teaching—much more. If you can't reach a student the first or second or third time, you have to find a different way of approaching the subject, and the only way to know a different way is to know a lot more than what you're teaching at that given moment.

But I would go a step further to say that, even at the earliest grades, the motivation of a teacher to teach a child to read could not be very great if the teacher has not personally experienced the joy of reading great books; motivation in teaching the elements of arithmetic could not be very great if at some point the teacher has not experienced the power of that language. So, subject matter knowledge is first.

Second, something that is missing from almost all such examinations now and that is tested in other professions is the ability to make judgments to justify instructional decisions. There is a knowledge base in education. It's right to do certain things, it's wrong to do others, and it's even important for prospective teachers to know what is not yet known. Just as it's important for a doctor to know those diseases for which we as yet have no cure, it's important for teachers to understand what is known and what is not known. Professional examinations generally consist in testing the ability to apply certain general principles and research to specific situations. At the present time, there are no teacher examinations that do that.

The third aspect of an examination, before someone finally gets the ticket, ought to be an internship program. Teaching is the only profession I know of where a person begins the first day with the same responsibility that he or she will have the last day—a profession in which practice and performance are certainly as important as intellectual knowledge, but it's just assumed that you can take someone who has been to college for four or five years and throw him into a classroom the first day to sink or swim. I know of no major corporation, I know of no law firm—and certainly not the medical

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profession—that introduces people that way. Any other profession that involves any complexity is different.

Now, of course, this idea takes an investment. It's going to be difficult to get an internship at a period of shortage, because instead of taking new individuals and giving them a full program right away, you have got to employ more new people since the new person isn't going to be teaching a full program. Or it means that an experienced person is going to have to be relieved of some teaching time to help some of the new people.

Unless we make the investment, we will be getting people who don't know their subject matter. We will be getting people who have no knowledge of what is known in education or how to apply it. And we will not really be giving anyone any help in terms of practical and performance matters. Then, in a few years, we will grant them tenure, and they will be with us for a long, long time.

WHAT WOULD make the very existence of such an examination effective? How do we know that anybody's going to pay any attention to it? So what? So a bunch of educational leaders, college presidents and others sit together, figure out what it ought to be and eventually they say, "This is it. This group has invented or created the right instrument." I suggest a number of things can be done on a voluntary basis that, over time, could have a substantial effect on boards of education and on states throughout the country.

First, I would say there ought to be just publicity. Such a board of professional education could publish, on an annual basis, a list of all those states that agree to employ only those who have passed the examination. So each year there would be a certain number of states in compliance and a certain number of states where the general public knows—and it will be headlined in each of those states—that this is one of the states hiring people who are below a standard set by a group that has some national recognition.

Second, I think there would be movements in the states and in local districts that did not comply. There would be movements to pass laws in the states, laws that would do for teaching what is already done for other professions; namely, that any school board member or school superintendent who knowingly employs anyone who has not met the standard is subject to criminal prosecution. We'd have to do it slowly or the jails would be full. (LAUGHTER)

By the way, I think the mere publication of the list would have an effect. After all, the number of Michelin stars that a restaurant has is important, and if some chefs and restaurant owners have been known to commit suicide in losing one star, we might find that some school boards could be motivated in the same way. (LAUGHTER)

Third, I would say that the teacher organizations could play an important role. I am prepared to say that within three years after such an examination is established, the American Federation of Teachers would not accept into membership any person hired as a teacher who had not met this standard, and we would urge the National Education Association to establish a standard for membership in exactly the same way. (APPLAUSE)

We believe this would have a very great impact. There would be pressure on states to adopt a standard that is high enough. The existence of such an examination, with large numbers of people taking it, would provide an interesting barometer on an annual basis. Just as we now have SAT scores and ACT scores and LSAT scores and others, we would have a national barometer that would tell us on an annual basis the caliber of the people who are applying, and in what numbers, to the profession—a piece of information that we do not have at the present time.

FINALLY, I do not believe that the traditional objection that such an examination would cause all colleges and universities and schools of education to offer exactly the same lock-step curriculum is any more valid in the field of education than it is to say that the existence of medical examinations or bar examinations means all law schools and all medical schools have exactly the same curriculum. They don't. There are different ways of preparing people for those professions, and there will continue to be different ways in ours.

This, then, is our proposal. We in the AFT believe strongly that the benefits of education reform will soon go down the drain as standards are lowered to meet the teacher shortage—unless a new and better exam is created. We are willing to do something that's very difficult for us—to refuse to accept future teachers who do not meet that standard. We will work hard to make this become a reality. (APPLAUSE)

"... I want to make it very clear that I am not talking about a national teacher examination established by the United States government. I don't think that's the right place for such an examination to evolve from. There are other professional groups that essentially do have national types of examinations ..."

Questions and Answers

Since a national standard of performance would be the aim of this exam, how do you keep the federal government from establishing a base line for the examination?

SHANKER: I don't see the federal government being interested. They've had a chance for 200 years. Nobody has proposed it. I don't see the federal government coming in at all. They haven't in other fields. You don't see the federal government coming in and setting a base line for doctors or lawyers or actuaries, dentists, engineers, or any other group. I would see no reason why they would do it in this field if they haven't done it in others.

Would this examination be a recurring requirement for teachers, and would it lead to federal licensing of teachers?

SHANKER: Well, lawyers and doctors, even though their examinations are of a national character, are still licensed by states. And I assume the same would be true for teachers. On the question of relicensing, I believe teachers should have to accept the same fate as people in other professions. I don't believe that teachers ought to be singled out. Probably, developments occur more rapidly in the world of medicine than in the world of teaching English or mathematics. But if other professions are required to be periodically reexamined, then teachers should not be exempt from such reexamination. On the other hand, where other professions do not require it, I don't think teachers ought to be singled out.

Mr. Shanker, if a person passed the examination without also going to college, could he or she be qualified to teach?

SHANKER: I'm ready to take the bar exam right now! (LAUGHTER)

Explain how the teacher exam would be enforced in more detail. What would happen to localities that didn't meet the standard?

SHANKER: I think the only thing that would happen at first is that local districts would be damaged in their reputation. But I do think that in the not-too-distant future, we would have a movement within states to make it a legal requirement—operating the same as the legal requirements of other professions.

What effect might the national teacher exam have on minorities who seek to pursue a teaching career? Some evidence is accumulating that minority teachers currently perform poorly on existing exams, leading to the danger of highly disproportionate representation of minorities in the schools—perhaps as few as 5 percent of all teachers in the 1990s.

SHANKER: We have the same problem in all professions and something is being done about it through some very excellent programs [for the disadvantaged]. I'm not

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talking now about extreme types of quota programs that produce numbers but ultimately give those programs a very bad reputation. There are quality programs that find minority youngsters early enough and provide them with assistance.

One [program] I discussed at a meeting yesterday is sponsored by the Macy Foundation. It's an outstanding program that reaches youngsters who are beginning high school, minority youngsters who cannot yet compete on examinations to get into high schools of special talent. These are students who've been selected because, in the judgment of teachers and supervisors, they are terrific students but their scores don't show that very well because they are overcoming some great obstacles.

I also think we need to have summer programs to reach poor minority youngsters. But I don't think examinations discriminate against minorities. They discriminate against those who can't pass the examination, and that includes members of majorities. We, as a society, would not want a program that would put people into place who practice medicine, or airline pilots, because we feel we have to provide a certain number of spaces on the basis of race or ethnicity. I believe the same about teaching. I also believe that given the proper outreach program, a sensitivity to the problem and special help, we will end up with the right numbers over a period of time. In the short run we'll have this problem. The current examinations have the problem as well.

Mr. Shanker, would the exam be only for teachers of kindergarten through the twelfth grade? How would college teaching be affected?

SHANKER: Colleges do research, and they have their own system that I think may come under some challenge. We were just discussing here the most recent Carnegie Report, a very interesting one about the extent of education now taking place in private industry, including programs leading to degrees. Most colleges and universities have employed and retained people based not on how they teach or their impact on students but on the quality of the research and the professional reputation of the individual. I think some of the competitive institutions now growing in the private sector that *do* emphasize what happens to students may well provide a great challenge to our higher education institutions—not to get away from research, but to have an emphasis that's equally great on teaching and learning, which has not been there in the past.

Would teachers in private schools as well as public schools have to take this exam?

SHANKER: They would only have to if the states compelled them to or if they voluntarily agreed to do so. I think the same pressure ought to be there; that is, if state governments enforce compulsory education laws and say that if you don't go to a public school you may get your education in a private school, then I think the state has the obligation to maintain the same quality in systems whether they are private or public. You do not have a system in this country where someone who practices medicine in a Lutheran hospital or a Jewish hospital or Catholic hospital doesn't have to be a doctor or doesn't have to be certified by the state. They do. There is a public interest and the same public interest exists with respect to the education of children.

What's wrong with the current National Teachers Exam established by the Educational Testing Service?

SHANKER: I would have to make a very long speech to say what's wrong with the test that has existed up to now. It is sort of a minimum competency examination that does not have very much in the way of a professional knowledge base. It has some types of common-sense questions on professional matters. Part III, of course, is completely missing—the internship—but I don't want to stand here and criticize that examination. It's better than nothing, and, furthermore, I understand the Educational Testing Service is revamping their entire examination. It's my understanding that there will be an effort to include materials in future examinations that deal with professional judgment and professional knowledge base. I haven't seen yet what they're coming up with so I'm not

going to endorse it. But that's an examination in transition. When finished, it may very well be the one that this national board will say, "That's it." Or it may be that somebody else will come up with a better one.

The national board itself—would it be presidentially appointed? How would the members of that board be designated for the job?

SHANKER: I don't have an answer to that, but there's a mechanism that's taking place in California right now. There is a state commission dealing with the question of the teaching profession, and it's funded with private foundation funds. The members of the commission were appointed by public figures, but in a private capacity. That is, the state commissioner of education appointed some, and the head of the education committee of the state assembly appointed some, and so did the state senate. These are public figures, but they didn't do it as the result of any act of legislation. They did it because they are concerned and knowledgeable people. And they came up with a very outstanding group in California. I think a similar process on a national basis could result in pulling together a group, a prestigious group, that would be able to do the job.

Would the test apply to practicing teachers—those who have been in the business for several years—or just to those about to enter teaching?

SHANKER: Well, my recommendation is that, in order to gain acceptance and given the fact that half the teachers in this country will be new teachers—newly hired within just a very short period of time—the way to reduce opposition to any such examination would be to make it for new entrants. There's at least one state, and maybe a second, where the state legislature has adopted a reform proposal that would include practicing teachers. I think if you do that, common decency requires that you do more than just administer an examination.

After all, if a state local education agency employed somebody five or 10 or 15 to 20 years ago and has kept the person there all these years, they have dirty hands. They did the hiring by their own standards. I would say that anybody who'd done that has an obligation to allow the current practitioners a number of chances or some special help. And I would go further to say that if somebody finally can't cut the mustard, they probably deserve a job somewhere else in state or county government—jobs that these people can do if they can't pass the examination.

The easiest way to get over the transition is to do it with new entrants, and that would be my preference. Where states decided to do more than that, I think they also have an obligation to take care of those whom they have hired and have kept and have rated as satisfactory for a long period of time.

Some critics might see the exam as a way to create a new kind of economic elite and thus elevate teachers' income in much the same way that other professions have done, like doctors, lawyers. Will you comment on that?

SHANKER: I confess! (LAUGHTER) You might also get the same quality and the same standards to go with it. (APPLAUSE)

Is it fair to establish national standards through the examination that some teachers may not be able to meet because of deficiencies in their state teacher training programs?

SHANKER: One of the very good reasons for establishing such an examination is that it will undoubtedly result in an improvement and a reform of teacher education. It will show that many such programs don't stand up. It will compel teacher colleges to screen their students before they enter. It will certainly be worse than an embarrassment for some institutions if they certify that someone can be a teacher and a very large percentage of their graduates do poorly on such an examination. What would we think of a medical school where, year after year, 75 percent of the graduates failed the medical examination; or a law school where no one passes the bar examination?

"... Teaching is the only profession I know of where a person begins the first day with the same responsibility that he or she will have the last day—a profession in which practice and performance are certainly as important as intellectual knowledge, but it's just assumed that you can take someone who's been to college for four or five years and throw him into a classroom the first day to sink or swim ..."

". . . I am prepared to say that within three years after such an examination is established, the American Federation of Teachers would not accept into membership any person hired as a teacher who had not met this standard, and we would urge the National Education Association to establish a standard for membership in exactly the same way . . . "

That would tell you something about that school, and I think it's about time we had an instrument that tells us something about education schools as well.

Mr. Shanker, what's the difference between the internship program you propose and the teaching practicum now in place in an educational curriculum?

SHANKER: Practice teaching in college is a very artificial experience. It's a short time, and a person really does not have any responsibility; he or she comes in from the outside. It is a very artificial situation, but it's the only practical experience most teachers have before they become full-time teachers. It is not a substitute for two or three years of planning, trying things out, observing different teachers and developing a collegial relationship with others. It just cannot compare. It would be the equivalent of saying that instead of a doctor having an internship, we'll forget about the intership and the last year of medical school. The doctor will go to a hospital for one hour a day or two hours a day and get in a little bit of practice. That's what we're doing now. It's just very different.

If a new examination is established, what would happen to the current requirements that new teachers must take involving certain college courses they need to be licensed. Would those college courses become passé?

SHANKER: I think one of the things this national board would do is look over the knowledge base and ask the question, "What is known and what is it that we should test teachers on?" I think it would result in many colleges giving courses not now generally available and that should be. And I think it might result in the elimination of some courses, at least the elimination of them as requirements. They could be available for certain people who wanted to have knowledge in that particular field, but they might very well not be viewed as part of what it is a teacher must have.

I do believe that the creation of such an exam would bring about changes in the curriculum in higher education and the professional courses.

Mr. Shanker, have you floated this idea with the secretary of education [designate], William Bennett, or with the superintendent of public instruction in California, since both presumably would be major players in putting together such a national board?

SHANKER: Not yet. I hope they're listening to the show. (LAUGHTER)

What reaction do you expect to your proposal from the NEA, the White House, teachers and Congress—not necessarily in that order?

SHANKER: Well, I think Congress doesn't really have a role. I think that many members of Congress as individuals would undoubtedly favor it. I don't know why anyone would oppose it.

I don't know what the reaction of the White House will be. I haven't tried it there.

I hope that the NEA would support it, but in view of their general opposition to testing. . . . Or if they are finally dragged to the point where they will say that it's all right to give a test, they don't want failing grades to count. But I do not believe that their official view is one that represents the views of teachers in this country. Since they are engaged in competition with us and since they do have elections within their own organization, I believe that over a period of time, the policies of that organization will reflect the views of their members.

I believe their members would like to be professionals in the same sense that others are professionals. And they realize that they're not about to have the status or the salary, not about to have a general public that gives the confidence to teachers to make the same type of decisions that other professionals do unless the quality of those teachers is certified by some such procedure. So I believe they'll come around. And I hope it's sooner rather than later.

I think teachers will like the idea, and this is what polling reflects. There are now several polls: there's a Gallup Poll, and there's a nationwide Harris Poll sponsored by

the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. We have done polls in many states. There is not a single poll that has come out nationally or locally or statewide in which teachers do not believe that there ought to be an examination for entering teachers. The idea of an examination for those who are already practicing divides teachers much more. But the overwhelming majority favor it.

I don't know that most teachers out there have sat around thinking about the implications of a national teacher exam as opposed to one given by the state or one where the local agency determines what the cut-off point is. But I must assume that when teachers answer the question by majorities like 80 to 85 percent that beginning teachers should have to pass a test, they really want future teachers to be highly qualified; they like the public to know they are highly qualified, and they want the public to respect them. They would like to make sure there aren't any incompetents and illiterates, because they realize that makes their own work much harder and their reputation suffers. So I don't see why they would oppose this since I believe that doing it on a national basis is the only way to make it work.

Teachers will quickly come to see that local examinations will be played around with, as will state examinations. You know, if you get enough of a shortage, there will only be one examination: Put a feather in front of the nose. If it moves, you're hired. Teachers know that. They've seen it happen, and they don't like it. So I think there will be that support.

What percentage of the nation's teachers do you believe are now competent?

SHANKER: I don't have any way of knowing, but I think it's a very high percentage. While there are some incompetent teachers, I think a very high percentage are competent. I think that we are still living with a handful of Depression-era people. There were a large number of people who came into teaching at the end of the 50s, many women who today would go into other professions but then felt that they were barred. Many teachers came in because of draft exemptions. Many came in because they felt that there would be another Depression. That is, I think we got a lot of outstanding people for some very bad reasons. And we still have them, though they're leaving. The people who are now the high school seniors who say they want to become teachers rank near the bottom—about 15th out of 19 different occupations [of those taking pre-college aptitude tests]. They score very low. Now we don't know whether those will be the ones who end up actually becoming teachers. But if the high school seniors who say they're going to become teachers, indeed, do become the teachers, then the percentage [of competents] in the future will not be very high. They will be very, very low.

In your plan, will the national examination board set the passing score, or would each state establish its own score, as is done now?

SHANKER: No, that's the key. If each state establishes its own score, it might as well burn up the examination. This national board should state that if a person falls below a certain point, such a person, in our judgment, is not competent to be a teacher. Otherwise, you begin these incremental changes: Well, the score now is going to be 75, while some state decides that, well, it's not going to be 75, it's going to be 72. That's not much different, is it? And then, the next year it's 68. Well, that's not much different. Before you finish, you don't have a standard at all. Any cut-off point is arbitrary. And there will undoubtedly be people who fail and who get a few points below. Let them take it again. If they're that close, they can take it again, they can pass the second time or the third time. But if you don't have a standard that is a standard, if it's moving at different times and in different places, then it's not a standard at all.

Is it true that in some school districts, the janitor makes more than the teacher?

SHANKER: Oh, yes, it's true—not only the janitor, but we have school districts where matrons on buses that transport handicapped children make more than the teachers. In New York City, those who repair windowshades in the schools earn $19,500

". . . Just as we now have SAT scores and ACT scores and LSAT scores and others, we would have a national barometer that would tell us on an annual basis the caliber of the people who are applying, and in what numbers, to the profession—a piece of information which we do not have at the present time . . ."

"... One of the very good reasons for establishing such such an examination is that it will undoubtedly result in an improvement and a reform of teacher education ..."

as a starting salary, whereas teachers earn $14,500. And, of course, one of the big problems we have, especially in urban school districts across the country, is that it doesn't make any difference to a city government if you have to raise standards since its main concern is maintaining parity among municipal employees.

So you could have a situation where, as is true in New York, in a recent announcement for a police officer's examination, 40,000 applicants came, whereas there are over 1,000 teachers who applied last year without meeting the minimum standards. Yet from the city government's point of view, the only important thing is that all employees get either the same percentage increase or, if there is any difference, the uniformed service should get a little higher than everybody else. You have urban policies in this country that have nothing to do with what the quality of educational professional services will be, but that treat all of these things as a local political issue rather than as a market issue or as a professional issue.

Mr. Shanker, will you frame legislation and seek a congressional sponsor for this idea? And who in Congress seems most favorably disposed toward it?

SHANKER: I'm going to seek out some individuals who could be part of the process to appoint the group that would develop the test—and not through legislation, but in their individual capacity. I don't think it's fair for me to say who it is I will approach on this until I've approached them.

People looking at the field of education do not see salaries at a level that would attract them into the profession. How is this going to be corrected?

SHANKER: Well, there's been some substantial movement in some places—California, or in New Jersey, where the fight now is between the governor and the legislature as to whether it will be $18,500 or $19,500 as a starting salary. I think that the effect of the reform movement over the past years has been to improve salaries—but not enough. I also think that we ought to be looking not only at salaries, but at other things that could bring people into the profession.

For example, a lot of people are college professors even though it doesn't pay an awful lot of money. A lot of people like the lifestyle. There's no reason why we could not say that a person who is a teacher isn't going to get rich. They know that. Even if we raise salaries, they're still not going to get rich. But there's no reason why we couldn't say that teachers, like college professors, every seven years would be guaranteed the right to a sabbatical leave. Sabbatical leaves are very inexpensive. A teacher who's at top salary is usually replaced by a teacher who is at bottom salary, which is half the amount. If the sabbatical is paid for over a seven-year period—and obviously it doesn't go to those who have left teaching during that seven years—that could be paid for by something like a 4 percent salary set-aside each year. That's a very small amount of money.

So, it's very attractive to go to a bright college person and say, "Look, do you want to go out there in the business world? You'll earn some more money, but it is a rat race. You'll get your four weeks vacation, or maybe six if you're lucky, and you'll wait until you retire before you can ever do the things you want to do—take long trips, go back to college, do other things." There would be people out there who would say, "I will take a job that pays a little less if every seven years I can have seven months off to do all the things everybody else dreams of doing." So, in addition to salaries, we ought to be thinking about other incentives that are not necessarily expensive but that are questions of an improvement in lifestyle.

Third, we cannot underline too much the fact that many people don't come to teaching or don't stay because it is not a satisfying job. The question of discipline, the question of violence, the question of having to mark the papers of 150 to 200 students—it's an impossible job. And I would say, more than anything else, the way you are treated in a school by administration determines your coming into teaching and staying.

Most teachers are treated almost the way the children are at any level of the school system. And unless teachers are treated better, you're not going to get people "who got smarts." You're not going to get and keep people who have a sense of judgment if they are being put into what is not essentially a professional situation where they are respected and enabled to exercise judgment, where they have the time and the ability to confer with their colleagues and to have a professional life, but where they're locked into a room for their entire lives with 30 or 35 students, and where they are really in an educational factory being given rules and regulations and observed as to every little thing they do by an assistant principal, chairman or principal. In our current school system, you almost get the feeling that the reason teachers are so observed and looked at and evaluated constantly is that people feel that anybody who would take a job at that salary can't be very good, and you better watch them closely.

So the people we're going to get under this proposal are going to have to be well paid. They'll have to be well paid, but they will also have to be treated with dignity. They're not the kind of people who are just going to take orders, that's not what a professional does.

DAVID HESS, President, National Press Club: *Mr. Shanker, we're close to the end of the program. I would like to present you with this certificate of appreciation for coming to the club to speak today and a National Press Club windbreaker to ward off the slings and arrows of the NEA. (LAUGHTER, THEN APPLAUSE) And the final question, sir—when will you run for public office? Isn't it time for a teacher president? (LAUGHTER)*

SHANKER: Well, I thought of that once. In 1969, I negotiated a contract with Mayor Lindsay, and every place I went taxicabs wouldn't charge me a fare, newspaper vendors would give me a free copy of the *Times* in the morning, and it really went to my head. Then I thought of the contract I had just negotiated, and I decided against running because I didn't want to have to pay for the contract. (LAUGHTER)

HESS: *Thank you, Albert Shanker. And that concludes today's National Press Club luncheon.*

"... We cannot underline too much the fact that many people don't come to teaching or don't stay because it is not a satisfying job ..."

Albert Shanker's call to create a national testing and licensing procedure for all new teachers was greeted by hundreds of favorable newspaper editorials in just the few short weeks after the announcement at the National Press Club:

Mr. Shanker envisions a national proficiency test of instructional knowledge and specific subject areas and an internship. Such a test might help upgrade the whole profession by improving its image and focusing attention on the need for better teacher education.

— The New York Times

"It was one more indication of how Mr. Shanker, once widely perceived as a militant union boss (on two occasions he was jailed for leading illegal school strikes in New York City), has kept his 600,000-member union in the forefront of education reform by being cooperative rather than defensive over recent changes in the nation's classrooms."

— Christian Science Monitor

"If Shanker has his way, teachers of the future will be far better prepared to meet the needs of students across the country. . . . It is unusual that a union head would make such a demand upon his members and others in the field."

— Philadelphia Inquirer

"Shanker meets the most important test for a labor leader — the ability to begin to acknowledge where the workers have to change as well as where management must improve. . . . This is light years better than the totally defensive position taken by the National Education Association."

— Washington Monthly

"Shanker is wise to try to initiate the improvements from within the profession itself."

— Gary Post-Tribune

"Shanker's points about state certification hit the mark. Too many teachers are too long on visual aids and other education paraphernalia and too short on substantive matters such as history and geography. . . As always, Al Shanker is a step or two ahead of the National Education Association and its affiliates."

— Decatur Herald and Review

"Implicitly, a profession is an exclusive society. Its members must go through a rigorous selection process; unqualified candidates are culled; only the best are accepted. A test such as Shanker proposed should be an integral part of that kind of screening system."

— Syracuse Herald-Journal

"If a prestigious professional group can come up with a prestigious test, and if taxpayers take enough interest in it, it could shame school boards and state boards of education into requiring their teachers to take it."

— Fort Meyers News-Press

"You can almost hear Americans nodding their heads in agreement. Yes, indeed, the man has a point. After all, aren't those who deal with our children as important as those who handle our torts and our tonsils?"

— Dallas Morning News

"Shanker is not merely hitching a ride on the bandwagon of teacher testing; he is offering to take the reins."

— Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel

"I think it will fly. Absolutely."

— Emily Feistritzer, education researcher and publisher

"As used car dealers have discovered. . . the profession must police its own ranks."

— Charleston Mail

"It was refreshing this week to see some of the harshest criticism — and sanest calls for reform — of teacher competency coming from, of all people, the head of a teacher's union. The deficiency in most teacher exams is not the unfairness, said American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker, but rather that they are too easy."

— Shreveport Times

"AFT President Albert Shanker has drawn praise from many quarters for endorsing new approaches to the teaching profession, such as career ladders and competency tests."

— Education USA

"Shanker, who made his reputation as a hard-bargaining union chief in New York in the late 1960s, is an outspoken advocate of raising academic standards."

— Los Angeles Herald-Examiner

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